In the claims:

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1. A method for searching a peer-to-peer computer network comprising:

collecting data about a plurality of computers within the network, including a network location of each of the plurality of computers;

selecting at least one computer to be a selected computer, based on the collected data; and

routing search queries from a user to the selected computer.

2. The method of claim 1, wherein said collecting data about a plurality of computers within the network further comprises:

sending a signal to at least one of the plurality of computers;

receiving the signal upon its return from the at least one computer; and

forming a profile characterizing the at least one computer, based on information provided by the signal.

3. The method of claim 2, wherein the profile comprises a round trip time taken by the signal during its travel to and from the at least one computer.

4. The method of claim 2, wherein the profile comprises information on the number of files contained within the at least one computer.

5. The method of claim 2, wherein the profile comprises information on the amount of content available to the network on the at least one computer.

6. The method of claim 2, wherein the profile comprises information on the capability of the at least one computer to process a search query.

7. The method of claim 2, wherein the profile comprises information on the number of connected computers encountered by the signal during its travel to and from the at least one computer.

8. The method of claim 2, wherein the profile comprises information on the number of additional computers connected to the at least one computer.

9. The method of claim 1, wherein the profile comprises information on a frequency with which the plurality of computers are connected to the network.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein the profile comprises information on which of the plurality of computers are currently connected to the network.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein said collecting data about a plurality of computers within the network further comprises:

collecting a plurality of statistical measures which characterize each of the plurality of computers,

and wherein said selecting the selected computer based on the collected data further comprises:

assigning a weighted score to each statistical measure for each of the plurality of computers;

combining the weighted scores to obtain a rank for each of the plurality of computers; and

ranking the plurality of computers according to the resulting ranks.

12. The method of claim 1, wherein said collecting data about a plurality of computers within the network further comprises:

monitoring data exchanges which occur between the plurality of computers.

13. The method of claim 12, further comprising:

storing the collected data in a memory, wherein at least a portion of the collected data is content data which comprises information on the content available for searching on the plurality of computers.

14. The method of claim 13, further comprising:

removing the content data after a predetermined period of time;

sending common user search queries into the network on a periodic basis; and

storing the results in the memory.

15. The method of claim 13, wherein said storing the content data in a memory comprises:

choosing a portion of the content data to store based on previous user requests.

16. The method of claim 13, wherein said collecting data about a plurality of computers within the network further comprises:

monitoring a current connectivity status of each of the plurality of computers,

and wherein said selecting at least one computer to be a selected computer based on the collected data further comprises:

selecting the selected computer based on the content data and the current connectivity status.

17. The method of claim 16, wherein said collecting data about a plurality of computers within the network further comprises:

collecting a plurality of statistical measures which characterize each of the plurality of computers,

and wherein said selecting the selected computer based on the collected data further comprises:

assigning a weighted score to each statistical measure for each of the plurality of computers;

combining the weighted scores to obtain a rank for each of the plurality of computers;

ranking the plurality of computers according to the resulting ranks; and

selecting the at least one computer based on the content data, the current connectivity status and the ranks.

18. The method of claim 13, further comprising:

storing a portion of the content data which identifies a type of file available for searching on the plurality of computers; and

selecting the selected computer based at least in part on the stored file-type content data.

19. The method of claim 1, wherein said selecting at least one computer to be a selected computer further comprises:

selecting at least a second selected computer based on the data,

and wherein said routing a search query from a user to the selected computer further comprises:

routing a search query from the user to the second selected computer after a predetermined period of time, or in response to a user request.

20. The method of claim 2, wherein said sending a signal to at least one of the plurality of computers further comprises:

sending the signal from a plurality of geographical locations which are remote from one another, wherein the geographical locations are selected based on their respective proximity to a plurality of users.

21. The method of claim 1, wherein said collecting data about a plurality of computers within the network is performed periodically, so that the collected data is approximately current.

22. The method of claim 1, wherein said collecting data about a plurality of computers within the network further comprises:

collecting data about a predetermined number of the plurality of computers at a first predetermined time interval;

ranking the computers based on the collected data;

retaining a set of hub computers which make up a predetermined percentage of the most highly-ranked computers; and

collecting data about only the set of hub computers at a second predetermined time interval which is smaller than the first predetermined time interval.

23. A system by which a user may establish an optimal connection to a peer-to-peer computer network, comprising:

a monitor which measures data about a plurality of computers within the network; and

a selector which selects at least one computer to be a selected computer, based on the measured data, and which outputs a network location of the selected computer to the user, to thereby allow the user to connect to the selected computer.

24. The system of claim 23, wherein said monitor further comprises:

a profiler which collects the measured data by sending a signal to at least one of the plurality of computers and receiving the signal therefrom, to thereby form a profile of the at least one of the plurality of computers; and

a database which stores the collected data.

25. The system of claim 24, wherein the profile comprises a round trip time taken by the signal during its travel to and from the at least one computer .

26. The system of claim 24, wherein the profile comprises information on the number of files contained within the at least one computer.

27. The system of claim 24, wherein the profile comprises information on the amount of content available to the network on the at least one computer.

28. The system of claim 24, wherein the profile comprises information on the capability of the at least one computer to process a search query.

29. The system of claim 24, wherein the profile comprises information on the number of connected computers encountered by the signal during its travel to and from the at least one computer.

30. The system of claim 24, wherein the profile comprises information on the number of additional computers connected to the at least one computer.

31. The system of claim 24, wherein the profile comprises information on a frequency with which the at least one computer is connected to the network.

32. The system of claim 24, wherein the profile comprises information on which of the plurality of computers are currently connected to the network.

33. The system of claim 23, wherein the monitor is a computer within the network, and further wherein at least a portion of the measured data is collected by monitoring data exchanges which travel through the monitor as they are transmitted through the network.

34. The system of claim 23, further comprising:

a memory which is a computer within the network, and which collects content data comprising information on the content available for searching on the plurality of computers by monitoring data exchanges which travel through the memory as they are transmitted through the network.

35. The system of claim 34, wherein the memory removes the content data after a predetermined period of time,

and further wherein the memory sends common user search queries into the network on a periodic basis and stores the results.

36. The system of claim 35, wherein a portion of the removed content data which identifies a type of file available for searching on the plurality of computers is separately stored,

and further wherein the selector selects the selected computer based at least in part on the stored file-type content data.

37. The system of claim 34, wherein the memory chooses a portion of the content data to store based on previous user requests.

38. The system of claim 34, wherein the monitor monitors a current connectivity status of each of the plurality of computers,

and further wherein the selector selects the selected computer based on the content data and the current connectivity status.

39. The system of claim 34, wherein the monitor collects a plurality of statistical measures which characterize each of the plurality of computers,

and further wherein the selector assigns a weighted score to each of the statistical measures and combines the weighted scores to thereby rank the plurality of computers accordingly, and thereafter selects the at least one computer based on the content data, the current connectivity status and the ranks.

40. The system of claim 23, wherein the selector selects at least a second selected computer based on the data, and further wherein the selector outputs a network location of the second selected computer to the user after a predetermined period of time, or in response to a user request.

41. The system of claim 24, wherein the profilers are located at a plurality of geographical locations which are remote from one another, wherein the geographical locations are selected based on their respective proximity to a plurality of users.

42. The system of claim 23, wherein the monitor and selector are located on a user computer.

43. The system of claim 34, wherein the memory is located on a user computer.

44. The system of claim 23, wherein the host monitor collects data about a predetermined number of the plurality of computers at a first predetermined time interval, and the host selector ranks the computers accordingly, and further wherein the host monitor retains a set of hub computers which make up a predetermined percentage of the most highly-ranked computers, and thereafter collects data about only the set of hub computers at a second predetermined time interval which is smaller than the first predetermined time interval.

45. A computer program product for enabling a processor in a computer system to implement a system for optimally connecting to a peer-to-peer computer network, said computer program product comprising:

a computer usable medium having computer readable program code means embodied in said medium for causing a program to execute on the computer system, said computer readable program code means comprising:

means for collecting data about a plurality of computers within the network, including a network location of each of the plurality of computers;

means for selecting at least one computer to be a selected computer, based on the collected data; and

means for routing search queries from a user to the selected computer.

46. The computer program product of claim 45, wherein said means for collecting data about a plurality of computers within the network further comprises:

means for sending a signal to at least one of the plurality of computers;

means for receiving the signal upon its return from the at least one computer; and

means for forming a profile characterizing the at least one computer, based on information provided by the signal.

47. The computer program product of claim 45, wherein said means for collecting data about a plurality of computers within the network further comprises:

means for collecting a plurality of statistical measures which characterize each of the plurality of computers,

and wherein said means for selecting the selected computer based on the collected data further comprises:

means for assigning a weighted score to each statistical measure for each of the plurality of computers;

means for combining the weighted scores to obtain a rank for each of the plurality of computers; and

means for ranking the plurality of computers according to the resulting ranks.

48. The computer program product of claim 45, wherein said means for collecting data about a plurality of computers within the network further comprises:

means for monitoring data exchanges which occur between the plurality of computers.

49. The computer program product of claim 48, further comprising:

means for storing the collected data in a memory, wherein at least a portion of the collected data is content data which comprises information on the content available for searching on the plurality of computers.

50. The computer program product of claim 49, further comprising:

means for removing the content data after a predetermined period of time;

means for sending common user search queries into the network on a periodic basis; and

means for storing the results in the memory.

51. The computer program product of claim 49, wherein said means for storing the content data in a memory comprises:

means for choosing a portion of the content data to store based on previous user requests.

52. The computer program product of claim 49, wherein said means for collecting data about a plurality of computers within the network further comprises:

means for monitoring a current connectivity status of each of the plurality of computers,

and wherein said means for selecting at least one computer to be a selected computer based on the collected data further comprises:

means for selecting the selected computer based on the content data and the current connectivity status.

53. The computer program product of claim 45, wherein said means for collecting data about a plurality of computers within the network further comprises:

means for collecting a plurality of statistical measures which characterize each of the plurality of computers,

and wherein said means for selecting the selected computer based on the collected data further comprises:

means for assigning a weighted score to each statistical measure for each of the plurality of computers;

means for combining the weighted scores to obtain a rank for each of the plurality of computers;

means for ranking the plurality of computers according to the resulting ranks; and

means for selecting the at least one computer based on the content data, the current connectivity status and the ranks.

54. The computer program product of claim 45, further comprising a plurality of means for sending the signal from a plurality of geographical locations which are remote from one another, wherein the geographical locations are selected based on their respective proximity to a plurality of users.

55. A method for optimizing a computer's access to information, the method comprising:

maintaining a first database which includes status information about computers within the network;

maintaining a second database which includes content information about the computers within the network;

filtering the contents of the second database using the contents of the first database, at a time of a user request for information; and

accessing at least one computer within the network based on the filtered contents of the second database.

56. The method of claim 55, wherein said maintaining a first database which includes status information about computers within the network further comprises:

updating the status information periodically, so that the status information is approximately current in time.

57. The method of claim 55, wherein said maintaining a second database which includes content information about the computers within the network further comprises:

intercepting exchanges between the computers within the network.

58. The method of claim 55, wherein said filtering the contents of the second database using the contents of the first database further comprises:

identifying computers in the network which are least likely to provide information desired by the user, based on the status information;

removing the content information from the second database which is stored on the identified computers.

59. The method of claim 58, wherein the status information includes a frequency with which the computers within the network are connected to the network.

60. The method of claim 58, wherein the status information includes a current connectivity status of the computers within the network.

61. The method of claim 57, wherein the status information includes a download capability of the computers within the network.

62. The method of claim 55, further comprising:

maintaining a third database which includes content information about the computers within the network which identifies the types of files available for searching on the computers within the network;

filtering the contents of the third database using the contents of the first database, at a time of a user request for information; and

accessing at least one computer within the network based on the filtered contents of the third database.

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